

# Failing to solve contract doctor issue risks ‘brain drain’

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*Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai says Malaysia risks a medical brain drain if it cannot resolve the issue of finding contract doctors permanent positions in the health service. – MMA handout pic, September 27, 2022.*

A MORE sustainable solution needs to be found for permanent placement of contract doctors at public healthcare facilities, Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai said.

The newly elected MMA president said it needs to be addressed as soon as possible or Malaysia may face a brain drain.

“There has been some progress but the root of the problem – the intake of medical students, the housemen training programme, the contract system for medical officers and the career pathway for the junior doctors – needs discussion for a more sustainable solution,” Muruga Raj told The Malaysian Insight.

There are a total of 1,500 permanent positions available to the 3,000 doctors graduating each year, he said.

In July last year, contract doctors unhappy with the situation walked out of public healthcare facilities as part of the Hartal Doktor Kontrak protests.

Clad mostly in black, the group held placards that read “we are future specialists” and “specialists in the making, yet our future is aching”.

Earlier this month, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin told contract doctors not to hold out hope, as the current system for medical, dental and pharmacy officers, while problematic, was here to stay.

The Health Ministry (MOH) has come up with a quick-fix programme, where the Public Service Department (JPA) will provide 2,000 permanent medical posts every year.

This year, Khairy said he managed to get JPA to offer MOH more than 4,000 permanent positions - including 3,215 for medical officers – the highest number of permanent appointments in the past five years. However, 9,000 people had applied for those jobs.

Previously, in the contract system, permanent positions only became available when someone retired.



*Contract doctors stage a protest at their alleged treatment by the Ministry of Health. – The Malaysian Insight file pic, September 27, 2022.*

## Loss of talent

Failing to place contract doctors could cripple the public healthcare system as many may choose to leave, Muruga Raj said.

“We will see bright young talent leaving for greener pastures overseas,” he said.

“We should regard it as our national duty to do all we can to keep the best talent serving in the country.

“When more leave government service, so too will the opportunity to grow our healthcare system.

“We can build as many facilities as we want but we will still need the human capital.”

Another issue that was highlighted during the Hartal Doktor Kontrak strike was complaints of bullying by senior doctors.

Muruga Raj said that this was another important issue he will be working hard to address.

“This type of behaviour has no place in the healthcare system and MMA will do all it can to eradicate this toxic culture,” he said.

Muruga Raj’s predecessor Dr Koh Kar Chai had denied bullying was a serious problem in the health service.

[Koh added](#) that recent reports of bullying should not be misunderstood, as reports often cited past cases.

His comments met with scorn by [contract doctors](#) who said that bullying was rife in the healthcare system.

The group’s representative, Dr Omar Shahala, said the MMA’s claim was “nonsense”. – September 27, 2022.